



Part 1: The Christian View of Suffering...

Definition of redemptive suffering: Jesus did not come to banish suffering but to give it meaning and redemptive power. Redemptive suffering gives us the dignity to share in Jesus' suffering for the Church. It purifies us towards holiness and configures us to Christ by the Holy Spirit, as well as greatly benefiting the Body of Christ

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He transforms human suffering giving it a supernatural value, a supernatural power, that is a far greater gift, a far greater miracle. But it is a gift so little appreciated, for it is known only in the light of faith; and the faith of many is weak. How many opportunities for spiritual growth and for helping others are wasted in complaining about the crosses of life.

St. Paul was so filled with the idea of the redemptive power of suffering that he exclaimed: *"I find joy in the sufferings I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His Body, the Church"* (Col. 1:24).

Think of it. By accepting willingly and without complaint the little inconveniences, irritations, frustrations, delays, setbacks, etc. which God in His Providence allows to come our way, we can pay in part the debt that we, or others, have incurred by our sins. Because God is **just**, He demands that the debt of suffering be paid,, but because He is **merciful**, He allows one person to *"fill up what is lacking"* in another member of the Mystical Body which is the Church. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, *"by the cooperation of Christ's satisfaction, much lighter penalty suffices than one that is proportionate to the sin"* (III, 49,3, ad 2).

Suffering in some form or other is the lot of every human, saint as well as sinner. But since our attitude toward them can make them **profitable** or **unprofitable** (even increase our misery), it is important to see them in the light of the Gospel, in the light of God's providence. That is because suffering can get one down, or it can bring one closer to God. It can make one resentful and bitter - even blaming God for his lot, or it can make one more conscious of God's providence at work. It can make one turn in on himself in self-pity, or it can help one to open out upon the world in apostolic and redemptive action.

That suffering is not something good in itself, is clear from the great number of Christian institutions (hospitals, sanitariums, etc.) established to alleviate human suffering. While the ills and hardships and setbacks of life can be instrumental in spiritual growth, in themselves they are something evil. Christians are not forbidden to seek the comforts of life, or to enjoy lawful amusements, or to seek remedies from pain. The Church does not glorify suffering for its own sake; but it does glorify God by the loving acceptance of suffering when the fulfillment of His will entails it.

In spite of Jesus' willing acceptance of the Passion, and His insistence that His followers must embrace the *"crosses"* of life, His human nature shrank from pain just as ours does. We see that in the Garden of Gethsemani; yet He willingly accepted it when commanded by His heavenly Father. *"I seek not my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me"* (Jn.5:30). The same should be the goal of His followers. Those sincerely seeking to grow closer to Christ know that it must be by way of the cross. Each day brings many little opportunities to submit willingly to various kinds of self-giving that go against the grain. Like Christ, we too can pray in certain painful situations, *"let this chalice pass from me"* as long as we are willing to add *"nevertheless, not my will but yours be done"* (Lk. 22:42). The Cross was the instrument chosen by God for the redemption of mankind. That is why Our Savior refers to the hardships and fatigue and trials of daily life as the *"cross"* that we must embrace if we are to be His disciples. Accepting them in union with the passion of Christ gives them a redeeming power, a redeeming value, a share in the fruits of His Passion. The *"cross"* can include everything that goes against the grain, and that can be an endless list. To mention a few examples: physical pain, mental anguish, disappointments, depression, humiliations, delays, sickness, poverty, set-backs in business, loneliness, being misunderstood or falsely accused, hardships and fatigue of daily routine, sadness at death of family member or friend, the difficult sacrifices in fulfilling God's commandments and the duties in our state in life, etc. All these entail suffering, and are part of the penalty of sin of our fallen nature and as an invitation to offer it up in union with Christ's suffering for the sake of our redemption and for others.

So, how do Catholics "offer up" their sufferings and sacrifices? In both formal and informal ways.

Formally, many Catholics make the morning offering to give to Our Lord that day's efforts, works, joys, sufferings, intentions, etc. (the form may vary). At the Mass, we exercise our lay priesthood by consciously, silently, privately offering ourselves up, along with the Son, to the Father during the Offertory.

Informally, we "offer it up" by simply asking God in our own words to use a suffering as it occurs; we often do this for specific intentions (ex., "Use this pain, Lord, for the salvation of my brother..."). After breaking three ribs and returning from the hospital, Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "I offered it up. The three ribs-I never offered anything up to the Trinity before so I did that." That's called redemptive-and creative-suffering!

Questions for understanding...

1. How does the Christian view of suffering differ from that of our culture?
2. How does Christ's suffering and death take our sin and illness and use it as a means of redemption?
3. Why did Jesus do so much healing when he was on earth?
4. Is suffering a consequence of sin?
5. How could redemptive suffering give more meaning to our daily lives? Do we expect too much physical healing as a result of our prayers? Have you ever experienced God's presence in the midst of suffering?
6. Why doesn't Anointing of the Sick automatically heal the person?

Part 2: Cinderella Man -A case study in redemptive suffering...

As any student of American history can tell you, hard times hit most everyone soon after because of The Great Depression. Not that boxing lost its popularity during that period, but money became tighter for the Braddocks, partly because of some bad investments. The boxing great also fell into a string of losses, eventually breaking his hand in a match and decommissioned from the sport as a result. Suddenly, Braddock has no way to provide for his young family, and work is scarce—especially for a laborer with a hand injury. Poverty threatens to tear his family apart, but rather than send the kids away to stay with his sister-in-law, he's committed to keeping his loved ones together at all costs.

Early on in the midst of the family's struggles, Braddock's eldest son steals a salami from the butcher. After his father makes him return it, he explains why he did it in one of the film's most emotional moments. It soon becomes clear that this isn't a movie about a man trying to recover honor or glory, or a boxer trying to defeat the bad guy. Instead, this is about a man fighting poverty, illness and starvation, to save his family. He's lost the battle if he loses his wife and children.

Review Questions...

1. In Cinderella Man, what was Braddock's *cross* in life?
2. Braddock refused to use his poverty as an excuse to be dishonest or victimize others. In which scenes did he illustrate this? Can poverty be a blessing in disguise? How so? Where does it focus our priorities?
3. How does the film portray prayer through the hard times? What does it say about showing thankfulness, hope, and honor when things are tough?
4. What do you think hurt Braddock more, begging for money or being physically beat up in the ring? Why?

5. Was Braddock justified in trying to keep his children with him at all costs?
6. What does this film say about pride? Braddock seems to be fighting to keep it in some parts and willing to sacrifice it in others. Are there different kinds of pride? Which is worth keeping and which should we throw away?
7. Jesus said, "Anyone who wishes to save himself will lose himself, but anyone who loses himself, his entire person, for my sake, will find himself, discover himself." Such a one will not be lost. This involves a loss of self, an exit of self, a forgetting-of-self. In what way does Braddock put others before himself? Was this out of love for God?
8. Does Braddock's story parallel anyone's in the Bible? (Hint: There's at least one from Genesis, and another with her own book in the Old Testament.) What can we learn about hardship and hope from people like these?
9. Suffering can get one down, or it can bring one closer to God. It can make one resentful and bitter - even blaming God for his lot, or it can make one more conscious of God's providence at work. How did it affect Braddock?
10. How at the end of the movie did Braddock's suffering pay off? In what way were his many sacrifices acceptable to God?